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ABSTRACT

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training's (CEDEFOP) activities and research relating to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have focused on three areas of action: (1) development of training for SMEs; (2) information on the training provision available in the member states; and (3) promotion of the exchange and partnerships in the field of training and research. The competitiveness of small and medium enterprises depends on training policies. Three priority training measures are as follows: training of SME employees; provision of information, advice, and assistance to SMEs; and exchange of experience and cooperation. CEDEFOP developed guides on management training in order to transform training needs into demand and establish a balance between training supply and training demand. Following some promotion and development schemes, evaluation/application activities were launched. Information was collected on training provisions, management training, existing databases, and distance learning enterprises. Promotion of information exchange and partnerships has occurred in Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and other European nations. The report concludes with eight observations by SME experts collaborating with CEDEFOP. These observations concern not only the activities of the Centre, but also the whole set-up of community action for SMEs and are included for their value to the commission's reflections on the programs it is now implementing. Seventeen references are included.) (NLA)

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CEDEFOP
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October 1991

Dossier on completed and ongoing activities in the field of "Small and medium-sized enterprises"

(First review 1986-1990)

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INTRODUCTION

In the last 4 years (1986-1990) CEDEFOP's activities and research relating to SMEs have focused on 3 areas of action:

A- **Assistance for the development of continuing training** for SMEs, in the form of studies or basic research, and guides and practical manuals aimed at improving the continuing training intended for businessmen, craftsmen, cooperatives and SME managers and directors in general. (Publications available in the Centre)

B- **Information on the training provision** available in the Member States of the EC addressed to businessmen, craftsmen, cooperatives and SME managers and directors in the form of documentary dossiers, identification of "centres of excellence", bibliographies and databases. (Publications available in the Centre)

C- **Promotion of exchange and partnerships** in the field of training and research between organizations dealing with SMEs, the aim being to promote joint action for the establishment of networks which encourage and facilitate cooperation both at national and transnational level.

These three areas of action mentioned above take into consideration the different types of needs at different stages of development of an enterprise; for reasons of systematic classification and with due consideration of the limits of such a classification, the following lines of action have been set out:

1. Development of entrepreneurial spirit
2. Aid for establishment of new businesses
3. Aid to existing businesses
4. Preparation of the SMEs for the Single Market of 1992

Annex 1 gives a graphic presentation of this outline. The most interesting aspects of each area of action and a number of detailed activities are presented in the three chapters of this dossier each of which corresponds to one area of action.

The persons and institutions addressed by all these approaches/ activities were:

1. The Commission (TFHR, DG 23, DG V, Unit for Equal Opportunities).

2. Decision-makers in governments, trade unions and employers' organizations via the Management Board of the Centre.

3. Intermediate bodies dealing with SMEs: Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Chambers of Trade, National Institutes for the development of SMEs, Management Schools, Associations of cooperatives and other relevant bodies depending on the type of action concerned.

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1 - AREA OF ACTION: "TRAINING" FOR SMES

"Renewal of action for the enterprise"

1.0 Status of the project - EIC Annual Conference held in September 1991 in Berlin

On 20 and 21 September 1991 the second annual conference of the EURO-INFO centres organized by DG 23 of the Commission was held in the Congress Hall of the Palast Hotel in Berlin.
It was attended by the 211 Euro-Info centres, members of the Community network, and high-level representatives of the government of Berlin and the Commission.
CEDEFOP, which participated in the working groups, also presented a stand with the Centre's publications.
The critical comments made at this conference were very constructive and were mainly directed at improving the services provided by the EIC network and were considered in general to be very satisfactory. This conference helped to strengthen the close collaboration between CEDEFOP and the Commission and they have combined their efforts to improve the training and information indispensable for the SMEs in view of the large market of 1993.

1.1 Historical background of the project

Will the success of employment policies applied by the Member States and the Community be dependent on the establishment and the development of competitive SMEs?

Will the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises depend in turn on training policies?

In the absence of substantiated certainties, it appears there is a strong relation between the existence of a living SME fabric and the positive results obtained in the efforts to combat unemployment and promote qualification.

This is one of the conclusions which emerged from the CEDEFOP studies and the workshops and seminars organized on CEDEFOP's initiative up to 1987.

Another conclusion to be drawn was that three priority measures are required in the effort to promote the creation of industrial activities, the integration of the new technologies and the emergence of new forms of enterprises.

These three measures are:

1. Training of SME managers and directors and also of the employees working there

2. Information, advice and assistance to SMEs

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3. Exchange of experience and cooperation.

However, it is a fact that in the field of training and employment, the models and theories which have been developed for many years are fundamentally based on observations of large companies and are thus incapable of being transposed to SMEs. One of the measures in the Commission's FORCE Programme deals explicitly with this issue (see Point 3.3 of this dossier).

SMEs cannot be considered as large companies on a smaller scale. They differ in one essential point: for them the local environment is a vital factor.

The studies conducted by CEDEFOP show the delays and the difficulties encountered by SMEs in the field of training, even though they face urgent and pressing training needs.
The following constraints or obstacles should be underlined:

- Lack of motivation on the part of the SMEs to use information coming from the exterior and the decisive role of SME owners or managers in this connection.

- The absence of a direct link between vocational training and the development strategy of the enterprise, and the vital role of persons dealing with the enterprise - researchers, analysts, consultants and trainers - in establishing this link.

1.2 Training of managerial staff: a group of special interest

This means that special attention should be paid to the training of businessmen, craftsmen, and the executive staff of cooperatives (managers), especially as the aid expectations of small enterprises are undefined and diversified. The manager is a "one-man orchestra" who often has not had college or university education. Even otherwise, education and training are not entirely geared to his needs. Thus, the experts consulted by CEDEFOP envisaged a number of specific measures designed to improve the effectiveness of training in view of the specific needs of the small enterprise:

- Introduce innovations and abandon traditional educational approaches.

- Make the small businessman aware of the needs of his enterprise and get him to express his views; the trainer or the counsellor should listen rather than prescribe action.

- Select and train experts (whether trainers or consultants) with the necessary skills and the psychological profile best adapted to the needs and the specific outlook of the individual businessman.

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- Coordinate the action proposed by the trainers and consultants, teach the entrepreneur to make the best use of the experts.

- Develop support material and the content of appropriate training courses which cannot be a reduced version of the material used in the large company.

- Encourage changes of attitude and behaviour in the businessman; develop his ability to predict, anticipate and plan events in a rapidly changing environment.

- Facilitate exchange, develop information networks such as a database which will be accessible to researchers and consultants and businessmen.

1.3 The Guides to competency in the design of effective training programmes

Following up these suggestions the Centre commenced the work to improve the effectiveness of SME training by developing the Guides on "Management Training for SMEs".

This series of Guides has the aim of improving training provision for SMEs in the Community countries. We are well aware of the fact that this provision at present does not entirely respond to the needs or even to actual demand. The challenge facing training is to transform these needs into demand and to give a concrete and effective response to this demand. This is of crucial importance to encourage and help SMEs to make full use of the Single European Market of 1992.

In the Community there is already a large provision of training, and many guides and manuals are at the disposal of those who wish to set up or develop small businesses. We also know that the term "SME" encompasses millions of different types of firms with highly diverse training needs. Therefore, our intention was not to propose one more guide to add to the many, because we do not believe that this will help to establish a balance between training supply and training demand.

These Guides are based on the idea that the best way of overcoming this gap is to develop, in the whole of Europe, a body of trainers and organizers who follow certain standards of competence in their work. They should possess all the "entrepreneurial" abilities required to reach the owner/manager of the enterprise and his staff through their services. They should also be capable of putting their recommendations into practice in order to ensure that the training product is geared to the needs of specific "consumer" groups.

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The objective followed by the Centre is that the trainers and organizers of training should use these Guides for self-assessment, mutual assessment and personal development. This Guide could also be the basis for a training programme for the development of SME organizer and trainer competencies in the Community as a whole.

1.4 Promotion and development schemes

Following some promotion and development schemes aimed at developing SME management training, these Guides were presented at European level in the course of a seminar in Berlin (June 1989). The Commission representative in this seminar was Mrs. Gaudin (DG 23). After the seminar it was decided in agreement with the Commission to launch some schemes for the evaluation/application of the Guides within the context of the "Experimental Training Actions" conducted by DG 23 and to do the same in agreement with various institutions collaborating with the Centre.

The applications/evaluations envisaged by the Centre took the form of several common projects including the following:

1. Project in Italy
2. Project in Spain
3. Transnational project Saar-Lor-Lux
4. Transnational project SMED (Small and Medium Enterprises Development)
5. Transnational project EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development)

More detailed information on these programmes is given in Chapter 3 of this dossier ("Promotion of exchange and partnerships")

1.5 Study on support policies for business start-up and the role of training

This study conducted in the 12 Member States of the EC gives a general picture of the status of new business start-ups and the support policies applied in the different countries.

An in-depth examination was conducted of some of these schemes in order to identify the typology of the intervening agents and to collect data on training and other essential elements in order to analyse the effects of the training given. This data was taken from some training schemes for business starters which have already been evaluated.

The wealth of information collected made it possible to prepare a summary with several recommendations on the support policies to be applied for business start-up.

Some of the findings:

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- about 1.5 million new enterprises are set up in the EC every year,
- one out of three new jobs is created by these newly-established small enterprises,
- the failure rate of these enterprises at the end of 3 years is approximately 50%.

The evaluation carried out in the research showed that it is possible to greatly reduce this rate of failure through adapted training and counselling (all other conditions affecting business start-up being equal).

1.6 Trigger function

It appears that all these activities launched by CEDEFOP have had the effect of increasing the awareness of organizations in contact with SMEs and have also acted as a trigger for many joint SME training schemes launched by these organizations who, without doubt, feel the need to find a "common European framework of competencies" for trainers and organizers of SME training. Given the fact that so many training schemes have been launched, there seems to be no doubt that efforts aimed at improving the quality of training for SMEs should be encouraged by providing "European" reference elements so that the different practices may be grouped around a common framework of competencies.

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2 - AREA OF ACTION: "INFORMATION" ON TRAINING PROVISION

Without claiming to have overcome the deficiencies of coordination and dissemination of information, which still exist, CEDEFOP has produced several reports which try to compile the following information:

2.1 **Information on training provision** in the 12 EC Member States
(Ref.: Guide to "Management Training for Small and Medium Enterprises", Annexes to Guides 2-3-4 and bibliography)

In the Guides on "Management Training for Small and Medium Enterprises" and in the study trying to define and analyse the key competencies of the trainer/ organizer, there has been a double focus on the activities carried out by the EC.

A. Table of activities implemented in the EC Member States with the following objectives:

- foster the spirit of enterprise,
- training for business start-up,
- training for small businessmen.

For each objective the leading programmes in each of the 12 countries are described with 14 general information variables relating to the programme: Country - Title of the programme - Target group - Sponsored by - Training given by - Special needs of the trainer - National/Regional - Length - Duration - Full time/part time - Number of programmes per year - Number of persons per year - Degree of innovation - Available material.

B. Case studies: for all target groups a case considered to be of "special interest" from each EC country and for each one of the above-mentioned target groups has been selected in order to give a more detailed illustration of the above-mentioned Table of Activities.

2.2 **Information on management training**

A second study on the provision of management training for SMEs within the EC consists of a less descriptive and more qualitative analysis of training provision.
(Ref.: "Management Education for Small and Medium Enterprises in the EC", Berlin, 1989)

This study indicates that there are two ways in which SMEs can be supported: firstly, they can be given material assistance (financial aids, preferential interest rate subsidies, tax relief, etc.), and secondly, they can receive "intellectual" assistance (counselling, courses, etc.). In practice, these two possibilities are often combined. But the question to be answered is which of the two types of assistance will prove to be more effective in the long run.

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One may assume that if the management of a company does not have the necessary skills, this company has little chance of surviving in the long term even if it receives financial aid. Thus the importance of management and efficient management skills for the viability of the company should not be underestimated. Investment to promote management training and its development could lead to a general improvement of management quality in European SMEs, and this seems to be a better guarantee for survival than diverse subsidies.

One may also assume that in the long term the SMEs' interest in training programmes will increase under the influence of another factor: the level of education of persons setting up new businesses now or in the near future is and will be higher than that of business starters in the past. This seems to be the outcome of a general trend and not only because the level of education is very high in growth sectors such as the high-tech sectors. Given this trend, it may be assumed that businessmen in the future will be more inclined to make use of well-designed programmes.

Ways and means of making these programmes generally known must be developed. It is therefore necessary to regularly collect and publish information on changes in the programmes, new approaches and the problems which could arise when implementing these SME training schemes. The more knowledge there is of SME training provision in Europe, the easier it will be for those who organize training or are trainers themselves to get ideas on how to improve their work.

Higher learning institutions, professional associations, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, specialized organizations and even large companies could initiate training measures for teachers/trainers and thus contribute towards more professionalism in the training offered to SMEs. At present there are no truly European institutions or programmes which deal with management training and improvement of management in SMEs. Against the background of the Single European Market initiatives in this field could stimulate the desire to introduce better training for "Europeanization" - something the business world itself would like to have.

2.3 Databases which can be used by SMEs

The Centre has conducted a study to identify and coordinate existing databases in Europe (EC) on institutions and organizations which develop training for SME directors and managers (Ref.: "Analysis and Evaluation of Databases on Business and Management Training Schemes for SME in the EC", Berlin 1991).

The study has the aim of identifying the information available in the form of databases or yearbooks in the 12 Member States of the EC.

The final report will present an analysis of the different databases and information sources on the basis of 16 variables; this will make

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it possible to have a relatively detailed knowledge of the content of databases and to compare them.

Product: At present CEDEFOP has information on 35 databases which are of specific interest for SME managers, plus a list of organizations dealing with SMEs and the most important training centres.

Countries studied: the 12 EC countries. Databases identified: 35. Project to be concluded with proposals for the establishment of a European database network on management training for small and medium-sized enterprises.

2.4 Distance learning

The Project Coordinator in the Centre for the "Distance learning" project had already said in the introduction to the first reports on the subject (Ref.: 5 parallel studies conducted in Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and France on "Distance training for management and administrative staff in SME/SMI"):
"Of all the measures taken for SMEs, those dealing with vocational training seem, for various reasons, to be the most difficult to implement, partly because the small or medium-sized enterprise is rarely equipped to carry out internal vocational training schemes and is at the same time traditionally distrustful of offers from outside."

One of the starting hypotheses of the above-mentioned studies is that, in view of the fact that SME owners/ managers are not inclined to participate in group vocational training activities and have very little time to devote to training, distance learning could be one form of training which would be well adapted to this type of user.

On this basis, the study tried to establish whether there was provision of distance learning for this specific group of SME managers and directors and if so, to analyse this offer.

The conclusions drawn from the studies established some important facts: 1) the initial context is difficult, 2) the perspectives are encouraging and they offer 3) lines of action to be developed and 4) proposals for European collaboration.

2.5 The paradoxical features of information on training

First paradox: in less than 20 years Europe has moved from a state of penury to a state of ample abundance in the matter of information on training; but, in most cases, little or poor use is made of this information.

Modern information processing facilities, which are broadly available to most countries, are only accessible to a small number of users.

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But, second paradox, this information has the fault of being over-abundant and insufficient at the same time. As it has been designed for specialists and the initiated, it is global and synthetic. It has its own language and its own requirements.

However, precise and localized demands are emerging, especially in the SMEs, for clear and pertinent information which can be used immediately in daily operations.

Information suppliers should therefore move beyond the mere production of data to explore these new needs and to satisfy this new rising demand.

An effective response to information needs pre-supposes high-quality communication between information producers and the users.

However, observations have shown that the enterprises, as a whole, make little use of information issued by public systems. They prefer to turn to private initiative.

Another paradox is that the heads of large and small enterprises are united in deploring the over-abundance of information and the lack of pertinent data for the problems they have to solve.

Thus, one of the most important tasks is to handle the information in a different way, depending on the sources and the legislation of the country of origin.

In one case it is the "law of establishment" which makes certain types of knowledge mandatory for SME owners and managers; in another case a specific "accounting system" is laid down and determines the relations between the enterprise and its fiscal and financial partners; in yet another case advanced social legislation justifies the organization of a well-established and efficient documentary network.

It is evident that information will be one of the leading areas of cooperation between European countries.

It is in this sense that the Community network of Euro-Info Centres which has successfully expanded in the last few years and provides relevant information to small businessmen, should develop a "Training" section which will, as flexibly as possible, also make information on training provision and specific advice available to small enterprises which need it.

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3 - AREA OF ACTION: "PROMOTION OF EXCHANGE AND PARTNERSHIPS"

3.1 The need to support exchange networks

The reflections which emerged in the course of preparing this report are based on a transversal examination of several cases presented in various publications and seminars produced and organized by CEDEFOP; they also include the cooperation projects sponsored by CEDEFOP, often with the assistance of the ESF.

The aim is, through a monographic and comparative socio-economic analysis, to correctly interpret the communication practices used in schemes which directly or indirectly involve SMEs in a regional or local, national or international context.

The purpose of this research was not to produce general norms, but to identify the principles underlying highly diverse policies and to derive some common features of communication practices.

From the most relevant conclusions a number of aspects were selected which may be summarized under the following five principles:

1. The foundations of a strategy for exchange and cooperation between SMEs lie in local development strategies.

2. Every practice of development through exchange and cooperation is intimately linked to a communication practice.

3. The communication practices are more efficient if they are innovative, voluntary and organized by an actor in a central position.

4. The resulting exchange networks are better structured if the provision of communication is detached from the provision of training.

5. The exchanges are more consistent and fruitful if they are embedded in development perspectives resulting from a collective choice and if they stress priorities fixed by the actors themselves.

The transversal analysis of existing models shows that, above and beyond the immediate objective of the programme (business start-up, training of executive staff, integration of youth in the world of work, new qualifications, etc.), all promoters of these communication practices have the implicit or proclaimed intention of bringing about a change in the economic, social, even cultural situation of not only the persons undergoing training but also of the specific area in which they carry out their activities.

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The concept of the networks is also based on the initial assumption that the provision of communication facilities is detached from the provision of training.

The first provision is the result of a relational information system based on exchange, the second provision the result of a centralist and traditional concept according to which training is a knowledge transfer process, a transfer from "those who know to those who do not know". This classical analysis of training provision entails a regrettable confusion of the concept of training in SMEs, which in itself would suffice to explain why SMEs have lagged behind in accepting training, even if there were not other structural causes inherent in the nature of SMEs.

3.2 Descriptions of some exchange schemes (A-B-C-D-E-F-G)

Without claiming to be exhaustive, we will present some of the exchange and cooperation schemes supported by the Centre:

A. THE LIGURIA-LYONS PROJECT (EURO-IN):

Implementation of a detailed programme consisting of three training sub-projects, financed in part by the ESF as pilot projects:

- the spread of information processing technologies in the SMEs,
- the consolidation and development of SMEs through recruitment of high-level executive staff,
- the establishment of new enterprises.

The positive results of this first integrated project, LYON-LIGURIA, (Synthesis document ISBN 92-825-9835-7) induced the two bodies to prolong and extend this collaboration.

Thus, in 1988, CCIL, ENFAPI C.O.L. and CREA (Confederacion Regional de Empresarios de Aragon) launched the EURO-IN project directed towards the preparation of SMI and SMEs for the 1992 Single Market.

The main objectives are:

- to change a bilateral collaboration into a European network of training and support centres for SMI/SMEs,
- carry out training oriented with priority to the needs of small enterprises,
- to help SMI/SMEs with fundamental subjects for the development of their competitiveness against the 1992 horizon:

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. internationalization of markets, technological innovation, strengthening of structures.

- extend exchange of experience to the participants of different programmes.

After this second positive experience the three partners, together with AIP (Associacao Industrial Portuguesa), decided to propose an innovative project baptized "EURO-IN 4" directed towards the integration of SMI/SMEs in the Single European Market.

B. PROJECT IN ITALY

The project consisted of several schemes in Italy dealing with the application and evaluation of the "Guides to Management Education for SMEs" in the form of joint collaboration of 6 organizations helping to provide training for SMEs with co-financing by the Centre.

Organizations: a) ECIPA-CNA (crafts); b) ENFAPI-CONFINDUSTRIA (businessmen); c) FORMAPER (Milan Chamber of Commerce); d) IFOA (Consortium of the Chamber of Commerce of Regio-Emilia); e) ISVOA (crafts confederation); f) SOGEA (Industrial union of Liguria); g) ISFOL (government agency, project coordinator).

Objectives: The purpose of the scheme was to check the validity of the Guides and to assess the possibilities of their use by the directors of selected training centres, and also to launch an experimental scheme which will have to deal with different contexts and the possible training routes in terms of the capacities of the structures and organizations operating at national level, and eventually, at supra-national level.

Product: A joint training programme encompassing the contents and means used including, inter alia, the Italian version of the Guides and the changes and suggestions made to adapt the Guides to the needs of the persons working in Italian SMEs.

C. PROJECT IN SPAIN

1 Collaboration between CEPYME ("Small and medium enterprises" section of the confederation of Spanish employers) and CEDEFOP with the participation of the "Small and medium enterprises" section of the consulting firm Arthur Andersen. Scheme to be co-financed by CEPYME and the Centre.

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Objectives: The purpose is to develop a pilot scheme based on the use of the Guides as an aid for the implementation of training programmes which are addressed to a group of small and medium-sized Spanish enterprises and make it possible to evaluate the validity of the Guides with respect to the Spanish entrepreneur. Changes/adaptations will be suggested.

Product: Pilot training programme developed on the basis of the above-mentioned Guides and adapted to the needs of Spanish SMEs.

2 Implementation of a study evaluating the Guides to competency for trainers by approaching SMEs in collaboration with INEM in Barcelona.

The SACE programme (Service d'accueil et accompagnement à la création d'entreprise"), set up by INEM in Barcelona, develops training courses for business starters which include among the material to be used, lists of competencies which the new entrepreneurs should intensify. As the competencies are the ones which the Guide proposes, the study will include an analysis of the usefulness of such an approach in a regional context.

D. TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN FRONTIER REGIONS (PROJECT SAAR-LOR-LUX)

A scheme using the CEDEFOP Guides as a reference framework was prepared for the training of the owners/managers of crafts enterprises.

This scheme will be applied in the Greater Saar-Lor-Lux Region, enlarged with the addition of Belgian Luxembourg and Rhineland-Palatinate. It will cover 4 countries: Germany (Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate), Belgium (Belgian Luxembourg), France (Lorraine) and Luxembourg.

Organizations: Chambers of Trade of the 4 regions represented by the "Council of the Chambers of Trade of the Great Region" (10 chambers).

Target group: craftsmen setting up new enterprises

Objectives: Among other things, the scheme proposes an "identification/description of the broad spectrum of ongoing activities in the Saar-Lor-Lux region in the training of managerial staff and CRAFTS ENTREPRENEURS; in this context, identify the possibilities of using the Guides and check whether programmes which have been designed according to the Guides can serve as a model for expert management consultants capable of analysing training needs, drawing up and implementing common programmes in the four regions."

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The final aim of this scheme is to prepare a common management training programme addressed to craftsmen in the four regions, which will be the outcome of a pilot project to be tested in the INTER-REG Programme of the Commission.

E. ESTABLISHMENT OF AN SME TRAINING EXPERT WORKING GROUP (EFMD PROGRAMME)

A working group consisting of experts from the most representative European institutions in the field of management training and the EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development) was set up to analyse and develop CEDEFOP's SME Guides.

Institutions: 16 institutions altogether, coming from the EC (10 countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and United Kingdom), Western Europe (Austria and Sweden), and Eastern Europe (Hungary), and other big organizations (EFMD, ILO) participated in the working group.

Products: A working seminar (EFMD Brussels, 20-26 March 1990). Two draft training programmes were drawn up: the first one for young in-company counsellors, "high flyers", and the second for "trainers/counsellors with over 5 years experience in SMEs".

The first training course was held in July 1991 in the University of Durham (United Kingdom).

F. PROGRAMME SMED (SMALL AND MEDIJM ENTERPRISES DEVELOPMENT: COMETT PROGRAMME)

The same CEDEFOP Guides, intended for SMEs, also provided the theoretical framework for the elaboration of a pilot programme for the training of trainers and organizers of training for SMEs. This programme was developed in 6 countries: France, Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden.

In each country 2 or 3 universities or management schools agreed to work jointly to develop the contents of the common programme.

The pilot project, financed in the COMETT programme, is coordinated by the University of Linköping (Sweden).

Start: 1 September 1990

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G. EUROPEAN DISTANCE LEARNING AND MULTIMEDIA PROJECT FOR MANAGERS OF ENTERPRISES

Four public training bodies (AFPA-France, ENAIP-Italy, INEM-Spain and IEFP-Portugal) decided in 1989 to produce a "teaching kit" for trainer training.

This project was born from a common wish to extend the present field of cooperation and also, in response to a request from CEDEFOP, to see how exchange between European partners could be encouraged through a common project.

Objectives

Jointly create this product intended for trainer training in four professional sectors which are essential for the development of an opening towards Europe in the four countries, and in which trainers are compelled to adapt their teaching because of the rapid evolution of techniques and markets: production methods, office automation, marketing and tourism.

Create a product capable of:

- benefitting a large number of addressees who are different in terms of their culture, their basic training, their environment and their pace of learning;

- being a "fundamental" product, both general and specific at the same time.

Create a product which will enable the use of adapted supports, of group training, of distance learning, of different learning speeds adapted to alternance training in the firm and transnational exchange.

Backed financially by the ESF, this "teaching kit" will be tested concurrently by each one of the four countries, thus enabling, with the same product - training and exchange -, an initial experiment with more than 200 "European" trainers.

3.3 Collaboration within the TFHR "FORCE" Programme and with DG 23

Among the operational objectives of the "FORCE" Programme the first one is to "encourage a greater investment effort in continuing vocational training, by developing innovative partnerships designed to encourage greater awareness on the part of the public authorities (especially in the regions), undertakings (in particular small and medium-sized undertakings), both sides of industry and individual workers, of the benefits accruing from investment in continuing vocational training".

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As very precise information on the content and functioning of the programme had been drawn up by the TFHR (Task Force Human Resources) of the Commission, the programme is not described in the Vademecum. It should just be mentioned that CEDEFOP put its "Guides for training officers and training managers in SMEs" at the disposal of the programme, in particular for the projects dealing with the training of training managers and entrepreneurs in small enterprises, thus enabling it to relate the transfer of knowledge to the analysis of training needs.

Apart from the Centre's contacts and permanent collaboration with the TFHR of the Commission, CEDEFOP also makes a point of maintaining regular contacts and continuous collaboration with DG 23 (enterprise policy, distributive trade, tourism and cooperatives). This enables us to have a permanent exchange of information, documentation and reports with SME experts and guarantees joint efforts in establishing the objectives of the Centre's work. The Centre has obtained the support of TFHR and DG 23 for the organization of the European Conference in Madrid.

The Centre also gives its support and assistance to the project set up by DG 23 to develop and improve crafts training in the peripheral countries of the EC.

In this project exchanges of young craftsmen undergoing training were organized by DG 23, the aim being to train young craftsmen coming from Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland in Germany according to the dual system. The final objective is to give them incentives to set up their own crafts firm in their country of origin after the training has been completed.

3.4 Promotion of personalized networks

The development of vocational training in SMEs through information, exchange and cooperation is a long-term undertaking which should be carried out at all levels of the Community: local, regional, national and international.

It should be stressed that all measures introduced to this end are irrevocably linked to a spirit of innovation and tolerance.

Innovation, because there can be no progress unless each person is aware of the urgent necessity, within the present economic and social context, of finding and promoting new solutions within a framework which is the most appropriate to respond to the needs of the SMEs and the aspirations of the men and women working there.

Tolerance, because the proposed programme calls for the commitment and the cohesion of all development agents in the pursuit of the stated objectives, and it cannot be successfully achieved unless it is pervaded with a spirit conducive to the partners involved.

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When proposing support of a communication policy based on personalized networks of information and exchange, the final target envisaged is the elaboration of a true "Community exchange strategy".

Whether it is groupings of enterprises, their support structures or formal or informal information and training networks, the objective is not to create new structures but rather to organize interaction between these different components within what can be called a federative multiplier system.

From the beginning, the proposals of the Centre, which gives full support to the organization of this exchange network, have been derived from a policy of communication and promotion.

We would like to stress that all the factors and all the actors required for this policy already exist; they are all in place. What is missing is

- a guideline for the entire set-up, a sort of master plan which will enable the different partners to integrate their SME-promoting efforts into a framework of Community action,
- a well-identified organization, known by all and accessible to the largest possible number, with the task of guiding or facilitating the access of users to the information they require for exchange,
- harmonization, development and promotion of the means specially designed to incite exchange, support it and disseminate the results.

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CONCLUSION

This report, though not exhaustive, presents a review of the current status of the Centre's activities for SMEs.

The three chapters dealing with the development of training, information and exchange have presented the main activities undertaken in each area of action and have also developed some reflections on the problems encountered and the difficulties to be overcome.

However, in the course of discussions with experts collaborating with the Centre, some comments were heard, not only on our activities, but also on the whole set-up of Community action for SMEs. These comments should be included in this report so that it can make a more useful contribution to the reflections on the schemes and programmes the Commission is now in the course of implementing.

1. It appears that the target group for Community SME policy is a very large and heterogenous group of firms.
   The magnitude of this group (92% to 99% of firms in the EC) does not permit efficient action if the aim of really reaching the small enterprises is to be achieved.

2. If a policy of action for enterprises is to be effective, it should first define the target groups of the aid programmes and then envisage a differentiation of the collective group of enterprises in order to ascertain the function of important variables such as
   - the size of the firm,
   - the priority sectors of activity in each country,
   - the environment and regional development needs,
   - the non-favoured groups (women, unemployed persons, etc.)

3. A great deal of attention should be given to training for very small enterprises (less than 10 workers) or "micro-enterprises" and small enterprises (less than 50 workers). These two groups have been "forgotten" and almost completely "neglected" as far as financial aid and training is concerned.

4. It has become necessary to produce a new definition of a SME which will take account of the completely different needs of small firms (including the "micro-enterprises" and "cooperatives") and the medium-sized firms, closer to "large companies" in terms of their resource endowment and their internal work organization.

5. The "intermediate agents" which generally serve as multipliers, namely, the chambers of commerce, industry and handicrafts and the national institutes for SMEs, do not manage to reach these very small enterprises which are, indeed, the most under-privileged and the most numerous.

6. In view of Point 5, emphasis should be laid on the importance for us of supporting these "networks" and all partners who can act as

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qualified intermediaries to reach the small firms, the cooperatives and the crafts world.

7. The statistics at our disposal in almost all Member States and at European level provide decision-makers with very sketchy information. Thus, there is an urgent need in all Member States to improve the statistical systems which collect data on enterprises.

8. Is it necessary to define Community policies for SMEs in general or in particular for SEs (small enterprises)? Is it then necessary to give priority to SEs in all Community programmes?

These remarks may appear to be provocative (they have been presented in a particularly succinct form), but they do reflect the very real concerns of the organizations in contact with SMEs and they have the aim of making a contribution to the reflections undertaken in this context by decision-makers and other persons responsible for the training addressed to SMEs.

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    - Guide 4. Trainer competency for assisting small businesses". 40 pages

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